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Debate on Climate Labeling for Food Continues in Sweden

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Trade Policy Monitoring

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Report Highlights:

In Sweden, the debate on climate labeling has been going back and forth since 2007, when two of Sweden's major certification bodies, KRAV and Swedish Seal initiated a project to develop a climate label for the food chain. The labeling rules together with the symbol will be presented at the end of November 2009 and is currently a hot topic for discussions.

General Information:

In 2007, two of Sweden's major certification bodies, KRAV (a key player on the Swedish organic market) and the Swedish Seal of Quality (Svenskt Sigill) initiated a project to develop a climate label for the food chain. Later, some of the major players within the Swedish food industry joined the project: Milko, Lantmännen, the Federation of Swedish Farmers, Scan and Skånemejerierna.

The Swedish government is supporting climate labeling by providing knowledge and is following the project closely. The purpose is to create a labeling system, which will reduce the negative climate effects in food production and give consumers a chance to make a conscious climate choice.

The climate labeling will be formed as a supplement to already existing labeling and will only be allowed in combination with other certification that requires sustainable food production. The label will present a good climate alternative within each product category, guaranteeing to the consumer that substantial improvements have been made. The first round include only food products produced in Sweden, but in the future foreign food processors will also have access to this voluntary labeling system.

In the summer of 2009, the first set of standards were published. The standards cover fish and shellfish, fruit and vegetable, feed production (all crop production), milk; mainly products with a low level of processing. Standards for cattle, swine, poultry, transports, processed products and packaging are expected to be published by the end of the year. Reportedly, Swedish Seal will launch the new climate symbol sometime in late November 2009. The first product to be labeled is milk.

Recent studies show that there is a consumer interest in climate friendly products and about 60% of consumers would like to see a climate label on the products in Sweden. However, not everyone is enthusiastic about climate labeling on food products. The Swedish Society for Nature Conservation is arguing that a climate label overshadows other types of environmental influence, such as eutrophication, increased use of fertilizers or threats to biodiversity. Other critics include complaints about imported products being treated unfairly and consumers getting confused by yet another quality label. Reportedly, KRAV, one of the initiators, decided to incorporate climate consideration into its own KRAV-label to avoid double-labeling.

More information about the Swedish climate labeling project can be found at:

<http://www.klimatmarkningen.se/in-english/>